



# KRANTIYOTI SAVITRIBAI PHULE: A PIONEERING WORK ON EDUCATION

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Savitribai Phule was the first woman who started the first ever school in India exclusively for girls at a time when nobody could dare to even think about educating a girl. In fact, every educated woman in the society owes a debt to her. There are so many big names of Indian women like Indira Gandhi (Former Prime Minister Of India), Pratibha Patil (Former President Of India), Sarojini Naidu and many others who have made their names in the history because of their education and wisdom. However, not much is available in the history about Savitribai Phule, a woman who kept the foundation for women education in India.

Savitribai was born in a poor family in Naigaon district Satara in Maharashtra on January 3, 1831. Her father was a farmer. At the age of nine, she was married to Jotiba Phule, a great social reformer. At that time, the Hindu Society was Male dominated who treated the woman as their slaves who have to strictly follow the instruction of the male members of the family. After her marriage with Jotiba Phule, she was inspired to read and teach by her husband. She was taught by him and sent for training in teaching at Mitchells School in Pune where she performed very well and remained successful. Then she opened a first ever school for girls in Pune in January 1848 with admission of nine girls of different castes on the opening day and became the first women teacher of India. She opened two more schools for girls with full support of her husband Jotiba Phule and in 1851, there were about 150 girls studying in these schools. She even inspired an eleven year old girl 'Mukta' Salve of her school to write an essay on Dalit emancipation which is considered as the cornerstone of dalit literature. She was moved by the plight of Dalits who were forced to live a miserable life in the caste ridden society. She thought that only the education could bring some improvement in their life. She opened another school for Dalits in her village Naigaon in 1852.

The Orthodox society could not tolerate these revolutionary and daring steps taken to educate the women and the Dalit which were against the rigid Hindu traditions of those days. They started harassing her. She was insulted, abused and threatened, mud and cow dung was thrown upon her but she faced all this courageously and continued with her endeavor. The Dalit were not allowed to drink water from the wells and ponds which were mostly meant for the upper class people and many time they remained thirsty. They dug a well in their home in 1868 for the Dalits which was also a challenge for the upper caste society. The British Government honored them in 1852 for their efforts in the field of education. They opened two more school for girls and one school exclusively for the dalit children. They also did great job to emancipate the miseries of widows. In those days, the marriage of the girls was generally solemnized with the men who were much older in age. Due to the high mortality, the husband died earlier. The widows were not permitted to remaining their head were shaven and they were forced to live an ascetic life. She decided to put a stop on this practice she took up with the barbers and persuaded them not to perform this unethical act of shaving the heads of widows. The barbers went on strike against the practice forced by the orthodox and cruel society. The widows were also sexually assaulted by the male member of the extended family. Once a pregnant Brahmin widow was about to commit suicide on account of her forced pregnancy. Jotiba Phule persuaded her not to do so and assured her that he will give her child adopted, his name after his/her birth to save her form disgrace. Savitribai Phule also gave her consent and kept the widow at their home for delivery who gave birth to a son. Later on they adopted this child who was named as Yashwantao. This boy was later on became a doctor. In 1854, they opened an orphanage for the young widow and the unfortunate children. This was the first orphanage started any individual in India. They also opened a "Balhatya Pratibandhak Gruh" for the delivery of the forced pregnancies. In 1873, they formed "Satya Sodak Samaj" which worked for the liberation of lower caste people from the suppression of the Brahmins.

Savitribai Phule was also a good poet of Marathi and English. In one of the Poems, she wrote about the importance of education in the following words.

"All gets lost without Knowledge

We become animals without wisdom".

Her first poetry composition "Kavyaphule" was published in 1854. Her poetry

was mainly centered at educational and social reforms. She is known as the "Pioneer of Marathi Poetry".

Education was considered to be a privileged only meant for the higher castes, but Savitribai emphasized on secular education. She believed that the need for proper education was as basic as that of the requirement of food and water and shelter. She preached the importance of getting an education for both boys and girls. She was the reason thousands of women liberated and started living to fulfill their dreams.

Savitribai Phule's poems and other writings continue to be an inspirational for many and remain pioneering in the struggle against India's caste system. She has put together some very valuable writing.

- 1- Kayaphule- collection of poems, 1854
- 2- Jyotirao's Speeches, Edited by Savitribai Phule, 1856
- 3- Savitribai's Letters to Jyotirao
- 4- Speeches of Matoshree Savitribai, 1892
- 5- Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar, 1892

These works have been collected together. "The Complete Works of Savitribai Phule" edited by Dr. M. G. Mali.

The support, cooperation and companionship that Savitribai gave Jotirao throughout his life extraordinary. The Ideal of equality between men and women and peaceful companionship that they have set. The Path-breaking work that they did in the fields of education, social justice, eradication of castes and the eradication of priestly power of illumination not only the past but also the present. It is a contribution without parallels even in the present times. This legacy of Savitribai will continue to enrich our lives forever. Jotirao and Savitribai focused on providing girls and boys vocational and practical education to make them capable of independent thought. They believed that an industrial development should be attached to the schools where children's could learn useful trades and crafts and be able to manage their lives comfortably and independently.

Savitribai insisted that 'education shall give one the ability to choose between right and wrong and between truth and untruth in life'. Savitribai and Jotiba built a revolutionary social education movement for shudras and atishudras women of the country. Savitribai went on to become India's first woman teacher and headmistress. It is her struggle and story that marks the beginning of modern Indian women's public life in India. The extraordinary couple was engaged in a passionate struggle to build a movement for equality between men and women and fought against the caste system. They dedicated their lives to spreading education and knowledge. She strongly spoke against the discriminating boundaries imposed on women, which led to their operation for social emancipation in India is the marker of her significant personality by getting to know her better, by coordinating her struggle and hardships, we will be looking like into a life that not only changed the face of education in India, but also enlightened humanity in its real essence. Savitribai Phule, the first formal teacher of the first women's school in India is a pioneer figure. She relentlessly fought against the dominant caste system and worked together the upliftment of the marginality. Savitribai Phule is considered as the light of knowledge of Indian women. Her contribution to the educational sector is immense.

The year 1897 dawned with the menace of plague. As soon as she came to know that the son of Pandurang Gaikwad in the untouchable settlement outside the village of Mundhwa was affected with plague, she went there and rushed back to the hospital with the sick child on her back. Savitribai caught the disease in this process and at 9 pm on March 10, 1897, she passed away.

Concluding lines of this paper with Savitribai's urging to learn English in her valued poem:

Learn English

Make self-reliance your occupation,  
Exert yourself to gather the wealth of knowledge,  
Without knowledge animals remained dumb,  
Don't rest strive to educate yourself.  
The opportunity is here,  
For the Shudras and Ati Shudras,  
To learn English  
To dispel all woes.  
Throw away the authority  
Of the Brahmin and his teaching,  
Break the shackles of castes,  
By learning English.

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